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ABSTRACT

Because teachers and students spend at least 180 days in school each year, it is important that school be an enjoyable place to learn and to spend time. Three components of teaching and classroom management help to make school a fun place to be. The first is security. In order to help students achieve this feeling, teachers (with student participation) need to establish rules that are consistently reinforced. Consistency enables the child to feel secure and understand expectations. The second component, ensuring success for each child, can be achieved by creating a success-oriented environment, one that links what the child already knows with new things to be taught, thus making goals attainable. Activities for involving children in the learning process include playing teacher, unison response, group discussion, and games. The final component is structure. Children need structure to know what is going to happen, and when and how it is going to happen. Structure might include a posted daily schedule, allowing for some flexible time, and appropriate settling down periods. The components of security, success, and structure intertwine and rely upon each other to make school a place where the learning process becomes a fun process. (LL)

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Making School Fun

for You and Your Students

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Abstract

Because children and teachers alike need to make a minimal commitment of 180 days per year, it is important that school should be a fun place to learn and to spend time. The more fun that students have while acquiring their education, the more they will learn. Likewise, teachers who find teaching to be fun will be more likely to make the learning process a fun process.

This article provides concepts and procedures for teachers as they proceed to make school a fun place to be. Security, success and structure (the three Ss) give teachers the direction needed to create a positive environment.

Making School Fun for You and Your Students

Each day children come to school, they should leave feeling that they want to come back the following day. Likewise, it is important that you, the teacher, will also look forward to returning to school the following day. It is your job, as a teacher, to be in school; and it is the students' "job" to also be in school. So why not make it an enjoyable experience for all? You are in charge, or at least you should be. You need to take the leadership role and make each day fun. If you are relaxed and in control, it is more likely that your classroom will be a fun place to be. But how can this be done? We'll call this the three Ss for making school fun. Those three major S words include security, success and structure.

SECURITY - Children have a need to feel secure. What can help them to have this feeling is to let them know what to expect from you and what is expected from them. First you need to set the standards (Cruickshank, 1986) and make sure that their meaning is clear to the students. Talk to the children about what you expect and discuss with them the reasons for those expectations. They can give lots of input into what the rules should be. You will also find students giving greater compliance to the rules when they have been involved in establishing them (Boostrom,

1991). There is a certain degree of personal commitment to complying with those rules.

Now that the rules have been established, it is important that they be followed by you and the children. When you observe students complying with the rules, reinforce them for displaying appropriate behavior. This is especially effective if another student is simultaneously displaying unacceptable behavior. The fact that the teacher is giving attention to one child, generally causes other children to strive for that attention (Dooley, 1988). Since the first child received attention for a certain behavior, other children will copy that behavior. Teacher attention is reinforcing and children are willing to behave in a manner which will gain for them the teacher attention which they desire. If the child cannot receive attention by being good, he will, in many instances, be bad. His end goal is to get the teacher to give him attention. An indirect relationship exists between teacher reward and negative student behavior. As teacher rewards increase (and these may merely be social) inappropriate behaviors decrease (Dooley, 1988). We may, therefore, conclude that as teacher rewards decrease, inappropriate behaviors increase.

The fewer the problems in the classroom the more secure the child will feel. Teachers have the ability to prevent problems

but they also have the ability to create them. When teachers don't reinforce appropriate behavior and they do reinforce inappropriate behavior, more negative behaviors occur. Additionally, a teacher needs to deal with behavior in a consistent manner (Cruickshank, 1986); consistent in how the teacher views the behavior. The behavior is either acceptable or unacceptable. If the teacher finds the behavior to be acceptable one time and unacceptable another time, students will get an unclear message. This inconsistency may occur because the teacher has changed his mind, is unaware of the classroom happenings, or is ineffective in dealing with what is transpiring in the classroom. The teacher needs to continuously and consistently evaluate classroom behavior. Good or bad, it is the behavior, not the child, that is the problem. The goal needs to be to reduce the likelihood of future occurrences, not to punish the child. If the teacher is consistent in how behavior is evaluated and in helping the child to reduce the undesirable behaviors, the child will feel better about himself; and the teacher will feel likewise. Consistency helps the child to feel secure because he knows what to expect and how to have his needs fulfilled.

SUCCESS - In every way possible, it is important for a teacher to ensure success for each child. When a child succeeds

with a task, he enjoys doing it and wants to do it some more; because he likes the feeling of success. It makes him feel good, and the teacher needs to create that opportune environment. In order to create a successful environment, we must start with the known, start with where the child is now functioning. Provide a link between what the child already knows and new things you want to teach. Make goals attainable. When a child reaches a goal or a smaller objective, rejoice with him. Give praise for progress and for effort. Praise can be followed with special activities or privileges (Stevens, 1985). We all need "warm fuzzies". Sometimes the "warm fuzzies" require a lot of work and the child needs encouragement and positive reinforcement for just trying. So if the task is difficult, let him know that someone is there to give support. Use the word "lets" so that the child knows that you are there, offering help and guidance to ensure successful completion of the task. Having the teacher's hand over top of the student's hand as he attempts new and difficult tasks can ensure success and offer encouragement as well. Success can be shown both verbally and non-verbally; and often non-verbal communication is more effective anyway.

Success can also be enhanced if the teacher provides a good model such as giving clues and cues, giving praise and giving

students a sufficient amount of time to answer without slowing the pace (Nigro, 1988). One of the best ways to see what kind of a model you are providing is to allow the children to play teacher (Brophy, 1982). In addition to letting you know how you are perceived by the children, the child who is playing teacher is probably learning more than when he was taking the role of student. Didn't you learn more when you became the teacher than when you were the student? Playing teacher is a great reward for the student as it enhances his self esteem. While this activity increases the amount of information the child learns, it also allows him to feel better about himself. Another advantage of a child playing teacher is that he is actively involved in the learning process (Cruickshank, 1986). Research has told us repeatedly that a child actively involved in the learning process learns more and retains it longer over a period of time than information obtained through passive learning (Killen, 1987).

There are additional ways that a child can be actively involved in the learning process. Several examples of active learning include:

- unison response
- group discussion
- games

- repeating a question
- rephrasing a question
- giving additional information
- asking a new question
- repeating a correct answer
- putting information on the board with explanation
- creating a game, puzzle or worksheet with answer sheet

These examples get the child actively involved, allow for multi-sensory input and provide for multiple exposures and practice (Guernsey, 1989), with an end result of success. A successful child is also a more cooperative child.

STRUCTURE - Children need structure. They need to know what is going to happen, when it is going to happen and how it is going to happen. If rules are followed or broken, students need to know what to expect. Children need this structure and feel more secure when structure exists. Most teachers also function better when there is structure.

Structure can exist in a variety of ways. It can include the schedule (Guernsey, 1989) or the plan for the day. Each subject needs to receive ample time. Subjects which take greater concentration need to occur in the morning. A flex time needs to be included before lunch and before dismissal. This time period

is less structured and can be utilized to finish an overflow lesson or allow for any emergency which might arise. Settling periods need to be incorporated first thing in the morning and immediately after lunch. This time period allows the children to get settled from having had unstructured, active time. Activities might include sharing, story time, puzzles or perhaps crafts. After the schedule has been developed, post it for all to see and make a serious effort to follow it.

Structure can also exist within a lesson. When you are structured, you are well-planned. Good planning is a characteristic of a good teacher and is a key component of being an effective teacher (Nigro, 1988). You need to plan for how to teach your lesson, how to reach your goal and how to have the students reach your goal with you. Know the pace at which your students can learn and keep the pace going with as few interruptions as possible (Brophy, 1982). An appropriate learning pace will help to focus student attention, therefore, decreasing the likelihood of disruptive behaviors (Guernsey, 1989). Materials you will need should be ready and sequenced. You need to plan for student involvement and be prepared for any unexpected occurrence. Know the manner in which you will have your students move from one activity to the next and from one area to the next.

When you are structured and well organized, time goes very quickly, students display more on-task behavior (Nigro, 1988) and are therefore less likely to get into trouble; and students' time is more wisely utilized. These are characteristics of effective learning outcomes and the end result--students not only learn more but have more fun learning. They feel better about themselves and you feel better about yourself. But remember being structured does not mean that you cannot be flexible. Lean with the punches, make adjustments and adapt when the situation calls for a modification. If you are structured but flexible, you will have a fun day.

Interestingly enough security, success and structure are all intertwined. They have common components. They rely upon each other and the inclusion of all three is needed to make school a fun place to be, where learning takes place.

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